

Development Applicants Survey Summary

Positives Aspects of the Process

In general, most of the respondents provided some positive feedback in their responses. Most respondents emphasized that they found planning staff helpful, knowledgeable, and professional when dealing with their applications. They also generally felt that applications were reviewed thoroughly and there was a good initial response to inquiries and applications.

With few exceptions, most respondents noted the pre-consultation process was an excellent part of the process. They found that it established requirements for applicants, provided a record of the initial discussions surrounding applications and was a helpful way to establish the requirements from other agencies and departments outside of Planning were looking for as part of the application.

Areas of Concern for Respondents

There were a number of consistent issues identified by respondents as part of the survey. Generally, these had to do with communication and timeliness regarding the processing of applications and are summarized in categories below. There were also concerns about clarity and the City's requirements for applicants.

Communication: There was significant concern about a perceived lack of communication from staff throughout the planning and development process. Many respondents found that while staff were friendly and helpful, it was difficult to get a timely response to inquiries about ongoing applications. They found that they would send emails or leave messages and would often not get a response, meaning they were following up multiple times for updates or answers. There was also concern that files were moved between staff meaning that there was not a single person they could communicate with throughout the process.

Timeliness: All respondents were concerned about the amount of time it took to get an application through from start to finish. In particular, there was concern about how long it took from applying for a pre-consultation meeting to receiving the minutes of the meeting to receiving a notice of complete application after the application is filed. Many applicants are finding that even if they did not require additional submissions or documents, it is still taking a very long time for their application to be deemed complete. There were a number of respondents who noted that some of the delays they were facing were longer than the timelines specified in the Planning Act.

There were a number of very specific concerns around the timelines for smaller applications, namely consents, which many respondents felt took much longer than in other municipalities.

Other Agencies and Departments: There was significant concern regarding the role and involvement of other agencies and departments as part of the development application process. Many respondents noted that one of their major concerns was the time it took for planning staff to receive comments from other agencies or departments which they felt was delaying applications. There was concern that staff and agencies outside of Planning did not respond in a timely manner or within the deadlines asked of them. It was also noted that sometimes a new requirement would emerge from an agency or other department part way through the application process which delayed submission and review. A number of respondents noted that there was not consistent messaging across departments when it came to applications and that, particularly among city staff, it would be helpful to have a consistent messaging and approach when an application proceeded to the Planning Advisory Committee, Committee of Adjustment or Council.

Forms and Resources: There were many comments regarding the ease of use of application forms and resources. A number of respondents felt that the application forms and submission requirements were onerous and repetitive and that it would be helpful to revisit the City's application forms and document requirements to streamline them. There was also concern regarding accessing resources, particularly online. This included the difficulty in finding the fee schedule for certain types of applications, accessing the zoning maps in an accessible format, and filling in and submitting applications electronically.

Submission Requirements: A number of respondents raised concerns about being asked to complete additional studies or being provided with additional recommendations part way through the planning process, sometimes after receiving a notice of complete application. They felt as though the City needed to be more up front as to what was needed and its requirements for applicants at the outset.

Pre-Consultation: Most respondents found the pre-consultation process very good but did note a few issues with it. The primary issue noted was the amount of time it took from submitting a pre-consultation application to having a meeting to receiving comments. Many respondents found that the pre-consultation meetings were too infrequent for the number of applications. There was also concern that the set up of the pre-consultation meetings made it daunting for some applicants, such as residential property owners, who may be dissuaded from participating.

Planning Advisory Committee: A number of respondents noted that they found that applications frequently bounced back and forth between PAC and staff because there were applications going to PAC without a specific recommendation. As a result, the applications were getting deferred as they were sent back to staff.

Messaging and Identity: A number of respondents noted that the City's messaging regarding what it wants for new development was inconsistent and unclear which played out in the planning process. There was a concern that the City as a whole struggled with a sense of place and identity which led its decision making and investment attraction to be unclear and inconsistent. This meant that many developers were not attracted to investing in the City and new development was not necessarily contributing local communities in a positive way.

Suggestions for Streamlining and Improvement

Communication: In general, applicants wanted to be able to get in contact more easily with the planner or planners working on their file and have their phone calls and emails returned more quickly. A number of respondents suggested that staff check in from time to time with applicants to keep them informed on the status of their application or implement a system where they could have more regular status updates.

There was concern from applicants who do not normally file applications that they were not familiar with who did what in the City and they were often unsure who to contact to address specific issues. There were suggestions that applicants should be informed immediately as to who their contact for their application should be and for the file to stay with the same person throughout to make communication easier.

Timelines: There was a suggestion that CKL develop and post timelines for review and response to provide clearer timelines for applicants. These timelines could include when a notice of complete application will be received by the applicant, when the application will be sent to review bodies for review and notice of when comments are received.

One of the areas of focus for tightening timelines was for consents, with suggestions that submission and processing dates should be monthly, as opposed to quarterly. There were also suggestions that it would be helpful to fast track certain rezoning applications, specifically those which are a condition of consent.

There was general opinion that some of the issues regarding timeliness came from commenting departments and agencies not returning their comments in a timely way. There was a suggestion that agencies should be given less leniency with submitting comments after the deadlines provided to them by Planning staff. It was also suggested

that some agencies were jumping in part way through the process and delaying applications by asking for additional studies or requirements because they were not involved from the beginning. To avoid this issue, it would be helpful if all commenting bodies were involved from the initial application to avoid that type of delay.

Pre-consultation: A number of respondents suggested that while the pre-consultation process was generally very good, the meetings needed to be more frequent and the minutes and comments returned to the applicants more quickly. There was also a suggestion that instead of having a formal meeting, the applicant could just be provided with comments from staff by email and could follow up with a more informal conversation or with any questions. Alternatively, there was also a suggestion that frequent applicants, such as developers, be provided with a general checklist of the range of studies required for every application with another list of additional studies as needed, in place of a formal meeting.

Staffing: A number of respondents suggested that there are not enough staff to process the volume of applications and respond to inquiries which is resulting in delays.

There were also suggestions that it would be helpful to have a single person as the point person on each file who could help pilot the application through the process and who the applicant could contact if they had questions or concerns.

City Policies: It was suggested that clearer city policies on some aspects of the development process, such as submission requirements, would speed up the process and provide clarity to applicants. There were also suggestions that policies be developed to address items that are often suggested in application comments and recommendations to provide greater clarity. Specifically, suggestions included the creation of architectural and community design guidelines and of clearer and more specific local policies on both archaeological assessments and development on rural and agricultural lands. Creating specific policies and guidelines would make the City's expectations for developers and applicants more upfront and transparent at the outset of the process.

Website: There needs to be more information on the website in general to make it easier to navigate the process and file applications, particularly for applicants who do not have a lot of experience filing applications. This could include clearer instructions on the website as to how to file applications, electronic applications, a checklist for general requirements for each type of application, and a more accessible fee schedule. There was also a desire for updated and interactive online mapping which integrated zoning and other requirements. In general, the development of more "self-serve" options was seen as something that would make the application process more efficient.